
Security Assistance Training Now on Line

By

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and

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Introduction

Beginning in January, DISAM greatly expanded its training interface with the user community with the introduction of an internet-based course on the fundamentals of security assistance. Known as the Security Assistance Management Orientation Course (SAM-OC), the course is designed principally as an overview of security assistance for employees of the Department of Defense, as well as other government agencies, who are new to the field or who may have part-time security assistance responsibilities.

Course Description

SAM-OC consists of thirteen lectures: an introductory session and twelve lectures on the various aspects of security assistance. Each lesson is taught by a veteran DISAM instructor who is qualified in that field. The course is designed to closely replicate instruction in a DISAM classroom. Specifically, in progressing through a lecture the student will be able to:

- View a PowerPoint slide with key points;
- Listen to the instructor's voice as he addresses those points;
- Follow along by reading the text of the instructor's remarks at the bottom of the screen;
- Navigate through the instructional pages either sequentially or at random by using the collapsing list of lecture sections and pages.

Lesson Topics in SAM-OC

- **Introduction**
- **Legislation and Policy**
- **Security Assistance Office Operations**
- **Foreign Military Sales Process**
- **International Defense Acquisition Policy**
- **International Sales Contractual Instruments**
- **Technical Transfer and International Program Security**
- **International Armaments Cooperation Programs**
- **Security Assistance Training Management**
- **Department of Defense Logistics**
- **Foreign Military Sales Financial Management**
- **A Comparison: Direct Commercial Sales and Foreign Military Sales**
- **Ethics and Standards of Conduct**

At the beginning of every lecture, the student will also see the instructor on video as he or she introduces the topic. Additionally, at selected points in each lecture, the instructor will ask the student to read or scan reference material, frequently found in the DISAM textbook *The Management of Security Assistance*, which can be accessed by a hyperlink imbedded in the lesson. Finally, each lesson includes a series of review questions to help ensure that the student has grasped a basic comprehension of the material. Because students can access and complete these lectures at their own pace, this type of learning is considered asynchronous. The other type of distance learning is synchronous instruction, which involves the students viewing and interacting with the instructor in real time, usually in accordance with pre-set schedules and on-line meeting times.

Distance Learning in DoD

The use of the internet as a training tool, variously called distance learning, or “E-learning,” or computer based training (CBT), has increased geometrically within the Department of Defense (DoD) in recent years. All of the military services have begun to exploit the advantages of distance learning and the Army in particular has been very aggressive. For example, usage of the Army’s Reimer Digital Library, which is the single repository for the Army’s training and doctrine information, has expanded from four thousand hits per month in July, 1996 to fourteen million hits per month in September, 2001. Other DoD schools, such as the Defense Acquisition University at Fort Belvoir, are now requiring the completion of some courses via distance learning as a prerequisite to attendance at other resident courses. In summary, distance learning has become a growth industry within DoD almost overnight and is certainly here to stay for the foreseeable future.

Advantages

Although the security assistance community is relatively small compared to other training audiences within DoD, it can reap the same benefits from distance learning that are available to other users. Here are a few of the principal advantages of distance learning, as designed by DISAM:

- Employees new to security assistance can begin learning about the field in their first week on the job, as opposed to waiting for the next available resident course at DISAM;
- Students can learn at their own pace, by playing a section of a lesson more than once, or starting and stopping at their convenience. SAM-OC has been organized into bite-size blocks to facilitate short on-line sessions of 20 - 30 minutes;
- Students can pursue distance learning from any computer with access to the internet, whether at work or home;
- Students may use the course as a refresher on selected security assistance topics, as appropriate; and
- Although there is no direct interface between student and instructor, the student may contact the instructor via e-mail link to resolve any questions.

Training Demographics of the Security Assistance Community

The introduction of an on-line orientation course is, in part, an outgrowth of a worldwide survey by DISAM in April 2000 on the training needs of the security assistance community. The

results of this survey were published in the *The DISAM Journal* 23:3, pp. 66-73. A few key findings of that study are repeated below:

- **DISAM Attendance.** Twenty percent of respondents had never attended a traditional DISAM course, although twenty-three percent had attended at least three courses.
- **Security Assistance Experience.** Forty percent had less than three years experience in security assistance, with nearly half of those having less than one year (this includes the military personnel in SAOs and unified command billets).
- **Distance Learning Experience.** Sixty-six percent had indicated no prior participation in computer-based training.
- **Media Preference.** Eighty-two percent of respondents indicated satisfaction with use of the internet as a learning medium.
- **Willingness to Learn.** An overwhelming eighty-five percent indicated they would be willing to participate in security assistance training through distance learning. Of these, only thirteen percent indicated a preference for pursuing studies during off-duty hours. The remaining forty-six percent preferred to study during duty hours exclusively and thirty-nine percent chose a combination of both on-duty and off-duty study hours.

Results of the survey support the conclusion that there is a need for, as well as a willingness to pursue, distance learning within the security assistance community. The SAM-OC course is one response by DISAM to those findings.

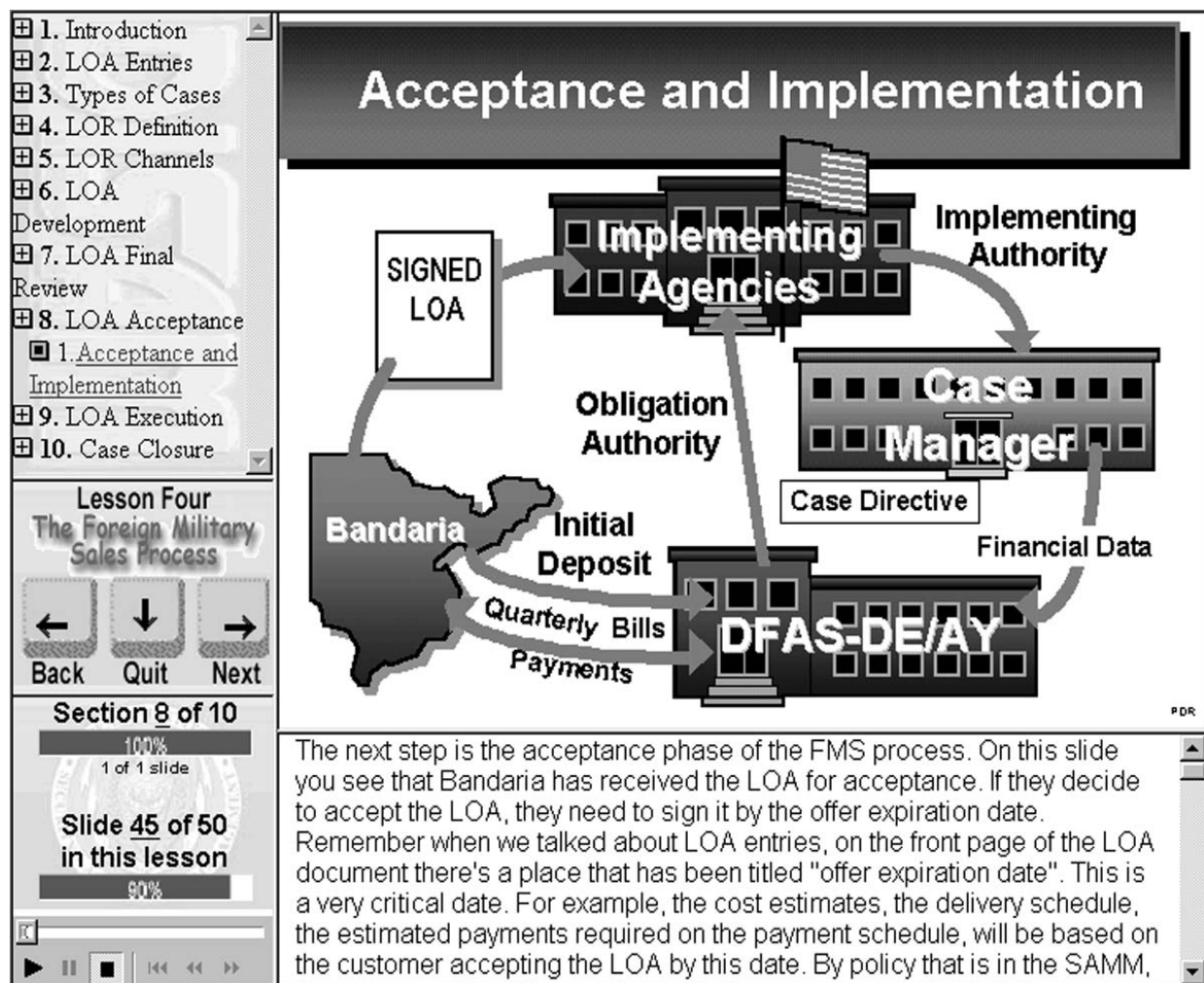
Target Audience

SAM-OC is not only designed to reach security assistance employees at an earlier date than resident instruction. It is also intended to expand access to security assistance instruction for DoD and other government employees who are on the periphery of security assistance or who would not normally have the opportunity for resident attendance at DISAM. A few examples of the target audience for SAM-OC include:

- Security assistance staff officers at the unified commands and the Joint Staff;
- Personnel assigned to SAOs overseas whose duties are not primarily security assistance and who therefore are not scheduled for the resident SAM-O course;
- Personnel assigned to Defense Attache Offices (DAOs) overseas who manage security assistance programs, often on a part-time basis;
- Foreign service nationals (FSNs) who serve in SAOs;
- Employees of other federal organizations with security assistance functions or oversight, such as the Department of State, Department of Commerce, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the National Imagery and Mapping Agency (NIMA); and
- Employees of defense contractors funded by security assistance. SAM-OC is *not* open to foreign (host nation) officials at this time. DISAM is not funded to provide training to the public at large, except where official duties involve security assistance and foreign military sales activities.

More Details on the Course

As a concurrent effort with the development of SAM-OC, DISAM has retooled the distance learning portion of its website. The most significant change is that the prototype distance learning course, the *DISAM Virtual Classroom* is gone, having been replaced by SAM-OC, which is an official catalogue course. After clicking on Distance Learning, viewers may follow instructions to register on-line for the course by filling out a pre-formatted e-mail message to the DISAM registrar. In addition to basic information about yourself, including your e-mail address, DISAM will ask for your immediate supervisor's name and contact information. This may be used to verify your eligibility to take the course, which is on a public domain website. After submitting your registration form, the computer screen will automatically take you to the login page for the course, which is <http://disam.blackboard.com>. Blackboard is the commercial firm which provides the content management software for the course. At this screen, you will create your Blackboard student account, to include your own user name and password. After reviewing all information submitted, the DISAM registrar will respond by e-mail, normally within one working day, confirming your registration and indicating that you are formally enrolled in the course.



Sample screen from SAM-OC

Once registered, students may access the course at the website above with their user name and password. The actual course content is located under a button labeled "Lectures." However,

during their first session(s) on-line, students are encouraged to “surf” through the remaining buttons, which provide a wealth of supporting and administrative information that may prove beneficial. Of special importance are e-mail links to the various instructors, should the student have questions or concerns on a particular topic. The course is estimated to take about thirty hours to complete, which includes playing the lessons, reading the linked material, and taking an end-of-course test. The test, which is taken on-line and timed at ninety minutes, consists of fifty multiple choice questions drawn proportionately from all thirteen lessons. Finally, an end-of-course critique offers students a chance to provide feedback to the DISAM faculty. Students have ninety days from registration to complete the course.

Computer System Requirements

As with all computer-based courses, there are minimum system requirements for accessing SAM-OC. These are discussed in detail within the distance learning portion of the DISAM website. Briefly, the key requirements are as follows:

- An IBM-compatible personal computer which runs Windows 95/98/ME with 64 Mb RAM, or which runs Windows 2000/NT with 128Mb RAM;
- An internet connection of at least 56 Kb;
- Internet Explorer 4.0 or later (Netscape Navigator is not supported);
- A 256-color monitor capable of a resolution of 800 x 600; and
- A current version of Apple Quicktime 4 or 5 and Adobe Acrobat Reader, both of which can be downloaded from the DISAM website, if needed.

As with all internet-based programs, bandwidth, or the speed of your connection to the internet, has a significant impact on the download speed of audio and video content in SAM-OC. Most machines connected to the internet in U.S. government offices have connection speeds that are sufficient to download and play the audio/video content in near real-time. Most users at home are connected via analog modems, which are significantly slower (28.8K, 56K). Audio files can take several minutes to load, and the user may experience pauses and buffering. While not ideal, an obvious fix to this problem is to mute the audio, or simply turn off the speakers. Although the student will not hear the instructor’s voice, the text at the bottom of the screen is an exact transcription of the audio.

The Future of Distance Learning

The introduction of its first official course via the internet is only one of several DISAM initiatives within the distance learning arena. In August 2001, DISAM released a training tool on CD-ROM entitled *Overview of the Letter of Request*. Targeted primarily at members of the overseas security assistance offices (SAOs), this CD offers a simplified but realistic look at the full range of factors which contribute to a rational and comprehensive LOR by the host nation and how the SAO can assist in this process. Later this year, DISAM will release a second CD-ROM for the security assistance training officer, which will offer a generic pre-departure briefing for foreign students headed to the United States. In summary, distance learning is gradually becoming a more important and visible component of security assistance training. DISAM remains ready to support the user community with additional distance learning products and solicits user input to that end.

About the Authors

Gary Taphorn is an instructor at DISAM, currently serving as the distance learning course manager. He is a retired Army lieutenant colonel and Middle East Foreign Area Officer, and has served four tours of duty with security assistance responsibilities. He earned a bachelor's degree from the Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio and his master's from Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.

Rick Rempes is an instructor at DISAM, currently developing and producing CD-ROM and web-based training. Rempes came to DISAM from the U.S. Army Defense Ammunition Center, McAlester, Oklahoma, where he spent ten years as an instructor and distance learning programmer. He has previously served as an Army civilian ammunition inspector and logistician and completed several tours in England and Germany. Rempes is a graduate of Central Michigan University.